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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001418

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/02/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: LEADING KURDS IN ANKARA DIVIDED ON SPLITS  
IN KONGRA GEL AND DEHAP

(U) Classified by Political Counselor John Kunstadter;  
reasons: 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) Summary: Kurdish DEHAP leaders in Ankara have asserted to us that apparent splits in terrorist Kongra Gel and in the Kurdish DEHAP are ephemeral. While allowing that a "misunderstanding" arose in Kongra Gel, they deny its seriousness and claim the dispute is being exaggerated by local media and elements of the Turkish State intent on weakening the organization's influence in Turkey. They also deny any lasting problems within DEHAP itself. In stark contrast, a close Embassy contact with deep ties to Turkey's Southeast and northern Iraq said the rifts run deep and are not likely to fade. Given DEHAP's political equities, we give more weight to our close contact's commentary. End Summary.

2. (SBU) Recent press reports are highlighting apparent divisions in Kongra Gel, the latest iteration of the terrorist PKK, and in the Kurdish political party DEHAP, explicitly linking the splits to a reported ideological debate within both organizations. Mainstream dailies have been focusing on assertions that Osman Ocalan, the brother of jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, has abandoned Kongra Gel camps in northern Iraq with some followers, an event that apparently corresponded with disagreements within DEHAP about who would run for mayor of Diyarbakir in upcoming local elections.

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DEHAP: Internal Kongra Gel Dispute Temporary  
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3. (C) March 2, DEHAP chairman Tuncer Bakirhan and party Vice Chairman Nazmi Gur downplayed to us the press reports of Osman Ocalan leaving Kongra Gel. Although reluctant to acknowledge any direct DEHAP contact with Kongra Gel, Bakirhan allowed that a "misunderstanding" arose recently within Kongra Gel's rank and file, but he did not elaborate. He asserted that the dispute is temporary, not based on any ideological differences, and that Abdullah Ocalan will resolve the issue soon from prison. In any case, Bakirhan claimed, "Abdullah Ocalan will never make a decision that will undermine the unity of Kongra Gel."

4. (C) Bakirhan further argued that the some members of the media and the Turkish State are exaggerating the split to weaken Kongra Gel itself and the organization's influence in Turkey. There is a six-hundred-year tradition of repression in Turkey, he said, during which Kurds led 29 rebellions against Ottoman and Turkish rule. He averred that elements of the State have an interest in maintaining or even exacerbating this tension between Kurds and the State -- a policy that could ultimately backfire by fostering a more radical Kurdish faction, he claimed.

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DEHAP: Internal Party Dispute Personality-Driven  
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5. (C) Turning to DEHAP infighting, Bakirhan and Gur explained that DEHAP chose to leave current Diyarbakir mayor Feridun Celik off of its election ticket for the upcoming polls and instead selected popular attorney and Kurdish rights advocate Osman Baydemir as its candidate. Celik later announced that he will run as an independent candidate, a move interpreted by the media as an indication of a wider divide within DEHAP. Both Bakirhan and Gur were at pains to reject speculation that Celik's move will divide the party and denied any connection between internal DEHAP wrangling and the potential split in Kongra Gel.

6. (C) Explaining the party's decision, Gur claimed that

DEHAP's own public opinion research in Diyarbakir revealed that Celik ranked fourth among potential party candidates for mayor. Gur also asserted that Kurds in Diyarbakir consider Celik to be an ineffective mayor, one who has not addressed the city's infrastructure and other economic problems. Gur also noted that Celik sees himself as a rival to Bakirhan, adding that he hopes Celik runs for office as an independent because a DEHAP victory in that case will provide further evidence of the party's strength. For his part, Bakirhan claimed that in consulting public opinion and local NGOs, DEHAP chose its candidate in "the most democratic" way possible. Mocking Celik's candidacy, Bakirhan said "if Celik gets 1,001 votes in Diyarbakir, I will quit politics."

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Not so Fast  
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17. (C) In a private March 4 meeting, a leading Kurdish right-of-center politician and longtime Embassy contact with excellent access to both Kurdish nationalist and Islamist circles told poloff that in contrast to the glass-half-full scenario Bakirhan and Gur describe, the rifts in both organizations are genuine and are not likely to go away soon. Our contact said he had heard from several Kurdish sources in northern Iraq that Osman Ocalan had broken away from Kongra Gel. He averred that Osman Ocalan represents a more "conservative" -- that is, more pragmatic in its Kurdish nationalism -- group within Kongra Gel. The other faction, he said, is led by Cemil Bayik, whom he sees as more militant and deeply disappointed with USG Iraq policy. Our contact asserted that the split is likely to be permanent.

18. (C) Our contact noted that the rift in Kongra Gel is having concurrent ripple effects on DEHAP, which he said is splitting along similar lines. He said there is some ideological convergence between hardcore leftist Kurds in DEHAP and Cemil Bayik's strident Kurdish nationalists. In addition, he claimed, the intra-party squabbling is also a symptom of an internal struggle over the party's financial resources. Those who were left off the DEHAP election ticket are resentful and are promoting friction within the party ranks, he added.

19. (C) Our contact contended that, as a result of internal party disputes, another Kurdish party could arise following local elections. For now, he argued, the factions will hang together to ensure a victory for DEHAP, since it is the only Kurdish party at the moment. To confirm his analysis, our contact phoned Feridun Celik during the meeting. Celik said he will soon withdraw his candidacy from the Diyarbakir race, added cryptically that "after March 28, something new will begin."

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COMMENT  
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110. (C) We take Bakirhan's and Gur's comments with a grain of salt. As DEHAP leaders, both have a clear incentive to downplay splits within the party and Kongra Gel. While their comments about the relative poor performance of Celik and other DEHAP mayors echo what we have heard from contacts in the Southeast and in Ankara, their arguments that current differences will be reconciled in time were unconvincing.  
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